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ABSTRACT

The service learning instructional methodology integrates community service with academic instruction and seeks to address local needs and develop students academic skills, sense of civic responsibility, and commitment to the community. The following elements are important for effectively organizing a community college service learning program: (1) start small; (2) identify key faculty who are interested in integrating service into their existing courses; (3) get help from faculty, administrators, service learning teams, and volunteers; (4) conduct a community needs survey or resource inventory; (5) promote the program through student publications and word-of-mouth; (6) create a custom-made service learning program that fits local needs; (7) celebrate successes by expressing appreciation to students, faculty, and local supporters; (8) form partnerships with community agencies; (9) incorporate critical reflection for students into the program via journals, group discussions, or other methods; and (10) incorporate evaluation methods that measure changes in students' attitudes toward community service and their coursework. Other considerations include ensuring adequate legal coverage for off-campus activities and establishing a strong infrastructure of financial and administrative support to sustain the program. Funding options include grants from state departments of education or local corporate foundations, federal money, grants from the Campus Compact Center for Community Colleges, or alumni. (Lists of service learning publications and organizations and information on the American Association of Community Colleges' service learning projects are included.) (KP)

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Community Colleges and Service Learning

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American Association of Community College
Washington, DC.

JC 950 503

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Community Colleges and Service Learning

I challenge a new generation . . . to a season of service—to act on your idealism by helping troubled children, keeping company with those in need, and reconnecting our torn communities.

—President Bill Clinton, January 1993

Some Service Learning Activities:

Math students tutor third-graders in arithmetic.

English students assist in an adult literacy program.

Sociology students educate their peers on HIV/AIDS prevention.

Nursing students provide home health care to the elderly or disabled.

Chemistry students and senior citizens educate elementary school students on proper disposal of household hazardous waste.

Criminal justice students walk downtown streets in a community policing program.

Accounting students help senior citizens with tax returns.

What Is Service Learning?

The service learning instructional methodology integrates **community service** with **academic instruction** as it focuses on **critical, reflective thinking** and **civic responsibility.** Service learning programs involve students in organized community service that addresses local needs, while developing their academic skills, sense of civic responsibility, and commitment to the community. Service learning is related to but does not include cooperative education, practicum, or internship programs.

Service learning is an effective teaching tool. Both faculty and students benefit, along with community members. Recent studies have shown that adding a community service learning component helps students learn more effectively. Critical reflection is the key element for relating the meaning of their service to course materials.

Service learning can work anywhere—in rural as well as urban areas, in all types of curricula, in large and small colleges. Community colleges in more than 40 states currently offer service learning to their students as a means of enhancing their education, giving them the opportunity to serve in their chosen field of study, and increasing their sense of civic responsibility.

Photo by Tara Kabir

Community colleges are ideal locations for service learning programs because community service is a part of their mission.

AACC American Association of Community Colleges

Organize a Service Learning Program

1. Start small.

Begin with service learning in one or two courses. This gives practitioners the opportunity to identify what works and what doesn't.

2. Find key people.

Identify a few faculty members who are interested in integrating service into their existing course curricula. A good place to start is with individuals who are already involved in community service activities. Focus on revising existing curricula to incorporate service. Think about including service in proposed new courses. Colleagues in other community colleges are excellent sources for sample syllabi, course requirements, service activities, and reflection and evaluation instruments, as they are eager to widen the reach of service learning and share best practices, successful ideas, and replicable program tools and publications.

3. Get help.

Faculty groups. Consider organizing a faculty advisory board or council. These groups can be invaluable advocates of service learning as a teaching tool. They can help establish faculty handbooks and guidelines for service learning courses, sponsor brown-bag lunches on service learning for particular departments or college-wide, or organize faculty development opportunities.

Administrators. Enlist the support and guidance of a key administrator. This may be a department chair, an academic dean, a director of student services, an administrative vice president, or the college president. Findings from an AACC survey suggest that faculty and administrative support are the two most significant factors contributing to the success of service learning programs.

Team. Some community colleges successfully manage their programs through a service learning team, comprising one or more faculty members, student services staff, and an administrative or academic dean. By sharing responsibilities and bringing different perspectives to the process, team members strengthen the program.

Office. A separate service learning coordinator or office may be needed. A service learning office is often housed in student services or student life, where staff can provide assistance in structuring the program, identifying community partners, and placing students according to mutual needs.

Volunteers. Volunteers can be key to getting the program underway while waiting until a funded position is possible. A volunteer could contribute several hours per week to help organize a service learning program, make contact with

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Essential Components

Conceptual

- **Academic Integrity**
- **Service That Meets a Need**
- **Reflection**
- **Civic Responsibility**

Operational

- **Faculty Support**
- **Administration Support**
- **Student Support**
- **Community Partnerships**
- **Service Placement Support**
- **Evaluation Process**
- **Public Relations**
- **Sustainable Funding**

faculty and community agencies, and start placing students at service sites. Often, students work or volunteer part-time as service learning assistants, helping to place other students, plan service events, coordinate faculty participation, and make regular contact with community agency staff.

4. Consider the community.

Before making student placements, a community needs assessment or resource inventory should be done, either informally through personal and telephone contact or formally through surveys or assessment forms. Community agency staff are invaluable in determining where students are needed the most. This process also helps educate community agencies about service learning. Community advisory boards often help ensure continual contact between agencies, students, faculty, and staff and ascertain evolving community needs.

5. Engage students.

Use groups such as Phi Theta Kappa, student government, the student life office, or campus publicity mechanisms (newspaper, radio station, bulletin boards) to inform students about service learning. Service learning's best promoters are its own students, who attract other students by word-of-mouth.

Make the most of community college students' family and job commitments. If time is an issue, faculty might build in one or two class periods where students perform their service in lieu of attending a lecture. If transportation is unavailable, service opportunities can often be found on or near the college campus. Students who live at a distance may be given the option of selecting a service site closer to their homes.

6. Get the best fit.

Successful service learning programs work in a variety of ways. No two programs are exactly alike. What works well at one college might not at another. Remember that it may be useful to distill approaches from a number of sources to create a custom-made service learning program that fits local needs.

7. Celebrate successes.

As a service learning program grows, celebration and recognition are important. Make opportunities to express appreciation to student, faculty, and local supporters. Plan a recognition day to thank participants for their contributions. Use these occasions to inform and educate community members about the program and to generate goodwill.

Photo by Tara Kabir

Partner with Community Agencies

Once community needs are known, select a few agencies and organizations that can extend appropriate service opportunities. Many colleges conduct training sessions for agency personnel to explain the difference between volunteers and service learners. Connecting community service with academic coursework may be foreign territory for many agencies. Their understanding of the academic base to service learning helps ensure that students have successful service experiences. Agencies should be given opportunities to evaluate students during and after their service and provide feedback to the service learning coordinator. Service sites include such places as public schools, senior centers, food banks, homeless shelters, domestic violence shelters, hospices, police departments, parks and recreation departments, and local chapters of the Red Cross, Habitat for Humanity, Special Olympics, and Boys and Girls Clubs.

Photo by Hocking Technical College

Reflect

Critical reflection is what distinguishes service learning from other forms of experiential education, such as internships, cooperative education, and practicum programs, and from traditional volunteerism. Reflection links the community service experience with course materials, such as readings and lectures. Reflective tools include:

- journals
- small- or large-group discussions
- individual or group projects
- writing portfolios
- in-class presentations

Both students and instructors can benefit when the service learners share their experiences with their classmates—all can connect service with learning.

Evaluate and Assess

Service learning experiences cannot always be evaluated in the same manner as exams or research papers. Many faculty administer pre- and post-service surveys that measure students' attitudes toward community service and civic responsibility, and toward their coursework. Not only do such instruments help instructors to evaluate their students and assess the usefulness of service learning, but the students can see how much they learned and how their attitudes may have changed due to the service experience.

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Legal Issues

Any time a student performs service off-campus in conjunction with coursework, liability issues, such as transportation or documentation for health care or child care workers, can arise. A college's legal counsel should be aware of any activities that could involve liability.

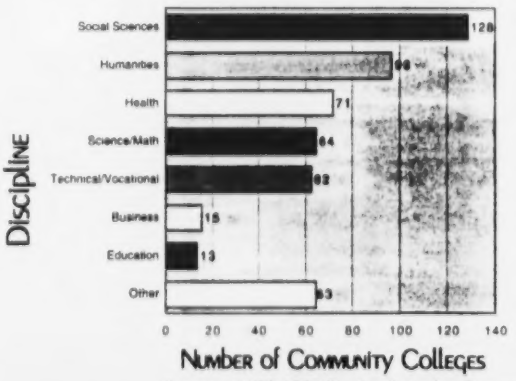
Sustainability

Good service learning programs should not dwindle away, so careful planning for sustainability is critical at the outset. A sound financial structure is just as important as an academic one. However, it is dangerous to rely completely on outside funds to support service learning. Community colleges use many different types of support for their programs.

Strong Infrastructure

- Solicit and encourage the college president's support, as well as that of academic and administrative deans and vice presidents.
- Obtain faculty senate support. Identifying and gaining the backing of faculty leaders is a good way to bring on board other faculty who may not be aware of service learning.
- Since service learning has its grounding in academics, involve the curriculum committee in revising and approving courses with service components.
- Work closely with the student life or student services office, which can provide assistance in student placement and agency selection.
- Establish a service learning team comprising faculty, staff, and administrators to share the responsibilities of running the program.
- Seek board support through special presentations. Trustees may help to create community enthusiasm.
- Publicize the program through campus and community media to demonstrate the need for and impact of service learning.
- Service learning may be institutionalized by reallocating student activity fees or portions of academic departmental budgets.

Service Learning Instruction in 204 Community Colleges



Source: AACC 1995 Service Learning Survey

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Outside Funding

This is something that will stick with me. I hope I'll be a better citizen for it.

Service Learner, Flathead Valley Community College, MT

- Small start-up grants of a few thousand dollars can allow faculty release time to revise curricula and integrate service learning in one or two courses.
- State departments of education and community service commissions may be good sources for grant money. State departments on aging may support intergenerational projects in history or psychology; health departments may assist with health care and public health projects.
- Local, regional, and corporate foundations may look more favorably upon service learning programs designed to benefit the local community. Businesses with a stake in local activities may be willing to support service learning opportunities. Some national organizations focus on education or service-related projects that can be duplicated anywhere in the country.
- Sources of federal dollars may be the Corporation for National and Community Service and the U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE). The U.S. Departments of Labor and Education offer grants for School-to-Work projects, under which some service learning programs may fall.

The service learning program is the best thing that has happened to our area in years.

Service Learner, Prestonsburg Community College, KY

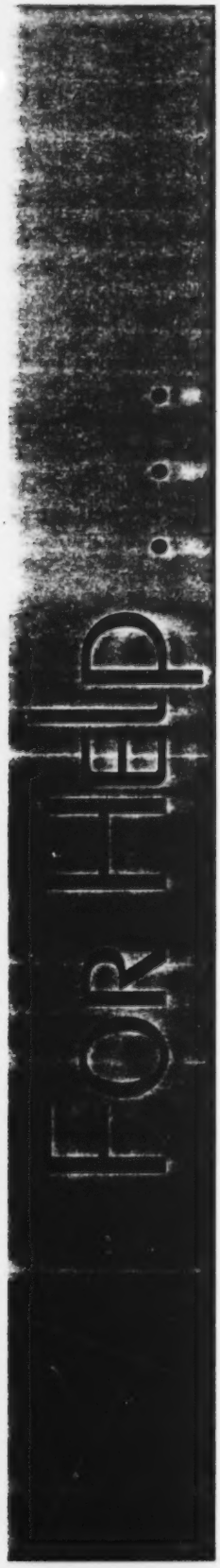
- Colleges with Internet access may utilize resources on the World Wide Web to check the availability of federal grants. The U.S. government maintains a federal grants "home page" that links to specific information on availability, eligibility, and application processes. The address is *http://timon.sir.arizona.edu/govdocs/grants/grants.htm.*
- The Campus Compact Center for Community Colleges provides grants to member institutions for developing and enhancing service learning activities. CCCCC also hosts an annual conference focusing on faculty development, reflection, evaluation, model programs, and best practices.
- Alumni may be an untapped source of ideas, support, and funding. College boards of trustees may be able to assist in identifying likely prospects.

Community College Service Learning States

◆ AACC Service Learning Project participants

States offering service learning in 1995

Source: AACC 1995 Service Learning Survey



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Organizations

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Corporation for National and Community Service
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Nonprofit Risk Management Center
1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 900
Washington, DC 20036
Phone 202/785-3891

National Society for Experiential Education
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Raleigh, NC 27609
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National and Community Service Coalition
409 3rd Street, SW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20024
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Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education
U.S. Department of Education
ROB-3, Room 3100
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Phone 202/708-5750

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Wingspread Principles of Good Practice for Combining Service and Learning

1. An effective program engages people in responsible and challenging actions for the common good.

2. An effective program provides structured opportunities for people to reflect critically on their service experience.

3. An effective program articulates clear service and learning goals for everyone involved.

4. An effective program allows for those with needs to define those needs.

5. An effective program clarifies the responsibilities of each person and organization involved.

6. An effective program matches service providers and service needs through a process that recognizes changing circumstances.

7. An effective program expects genuine, active, and sustained organizational commitment.

8. An effective program includes training, supervision, monitoring, support, recognition, and evaluation to meet service and learning goals.

9. An effective program insures that the time commitment for service and learning is flexible, appropriate, and in the best interests of all involved.

10. An effective program is committed to program participation by and with diverse populations.

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AACC's Service Learning Project

AACC's service learning initiative began with a 1994 grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service to strengthen the service learning infrastructure within and across community colleges, and to help train faculty members in skills needed to develop effective service learning opportunities. The AACC project has three components:

- National data collection. Results of a national survey in 1995 indicated 75 percent of community colleges are either actively involved in or interested in offering service learning on their campuses. The AACC Service Learning Clearinghouse provides contact names at community colleges that currently offer service learning, as well as a variety of materials about the AACC project and other community college service learning programs.
- AACC Service Learning Colleges. Eight competitively selected community colleges are working together to serve as models for other colleges: Alpena Community College, MI; Flathead Valley Community College, MT; Hocking Technical College, OH; Johnson County Community College, KS; Kapi'olani Community College, HI; Monroe Community College, NY; Prestonsburg Community College, KY; and Truman College, IL. Three additional colleges have received small technical assistance grants: Navajo Community College, AZ; Albuquerque Technical-Vocational Institute, NM; and Northern Virginia Community College-Manassas, VA.
- Technical assistance. Grantee colleges are guided by AACC's Service Learning Mentor Team, comprising six experienced service learning professionals from Chandler-Gilbert Community College, AZ; Community College of Aurora, CO; Hagerstown Junior College, MD; Miami-Dade Community College, FL; and Piedmont Virginia Community College, VA. Technical assistance is also offered through conferences and an Internet listserv.

For more information, contact:

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